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EVENTS FOR EVERYONE

There is no doubt that the expectations of MICE customers are evolving. This is common knowledge, and a similar trend is affecting other industries. While the pandemic certainly accelerated the discussed changes, even without it the meetings sector would still be in a different place today than only a few years ago. Among the many factors influencing this state of things, those resulting from progressing globalization and generational changes come to the fore.

Representatives of younger generations constitute an increasingly numerous group of employees of companies and corporations worldwide, and thus more and more often take part in MICE activities. Compared to their more experienced colleagues, they are much more willing to combine private and professional life, as evidenced by the phenomenon of bleisure. In addition, they pay much more attention to everything that is local, and thus more original and one-of-a-kind. The good news for our industry is that they eagerly invest not only in material goods, but predominantly in experiences. They are also more determined to become involved in actions aimed at environmental protection and support of local communities, placing legacy at the core of their approach.

As a result, event organisers outdo each other in coming up with concepts intended to match the needs of present-day participants and guarantee unique experiences making lasting memories. Recently new technologies have been particularly helpful in achieving this goal. Made increasingly popular after the pandemic, well-liked, effective and awe-inspiring, they seem to be the perfect solution. This is often the case, but not always. And certainly not when they are not smartly combined with intriguing content and a narrative tailored to the target group's expectations. A great example involves representatives of slightly older generations, who continue to participate in MICE events but tend to be overshadowed by the focus on younger attendees. Meanwhile, generation X members are not fully comfortable when surrounded by communication centred on multimedia and automation. Obviously, this does not mean that there is something inherently wrong with technology, quite the opposite. The key to success, however, lies in a moderate and skilful application of various available tools. It is also absolutely essential to compile a highly distinctive programme.

How then to design original events that are simultaneously friendly to all participants and engaging on various levels? This issue of THINK MICE certainly includes many inspiring ideas that might prove helpful when implementing this vision. Among other topics, it covers the psychology of events enabling the development of brain-friendly neuroevents (tiny details can make or break an event, as each of us is different), sustainable development, the power of cooperation, smart specialisations, and what needs to be done to become a first-rate and internationally competitive event destination. We also recognize the latest trends and take a closer look at the abovementioned technical novelties, including the widely discussed ChatGPT.

All of these topics are highly recommended, especially that experience shows that you can effectively combine particular components co-creating the picture of the modern meetings industry (even those that at first glance might not have much in common). If you are aware of this phenomenon, you will make the most of opportunities created by these 'connections'.

Michał Kalarus

THINK MICE

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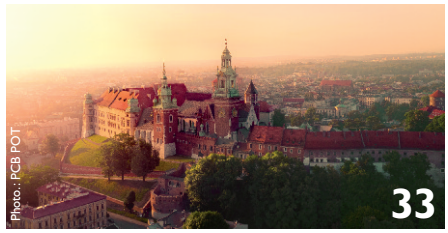
SCAN ME

THINK MICE is a magazine dedicated to the Polish and international meetings industry (MICE – meetings, incentives, conferences, events) and its scope encompasses all of the segments in question: meetings, incentive trips, congresses and conferences. By adopting an in-depth and multi-faceted approach to all covered issues, we present the role and significance of the industry for, i.a. broadly defined marketing communication, employer branding and destination marketing.



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NEW Convention Bureau in Poland

As business tourism revenues are gradually growing, the Silesian Voivodeship will focus more strongly on the sector's development. The Silesian Tourist Organisation has set up the Silesia Convention Bureau to pursue this goal.

Located in southern Poland, the well-connected Silesian Voivodeship is distinguished by diverse tourism potential, high-quality infrastructure, and many tourist attractions. In recent years, it has been visited by almost 6 million guests. All this makes the region an attractive destination also for business events. This potential requires formalised support.

At the inaugural conference of the Silesia Convention Bureau at the Silesian Stadium in Chorzów an agreement was signed with first consortium members. These include representatives of the world of science and large and small businesses providing diverse services and operating in sub-regions of the Silesian Voivodeship. "Thanks to the activity of the Silesia Convention Bureau, hotels, restaurants, operators of tourist attractions, congress venues, and companies organising incentive events will benefit, as they will receive comprehensive information and tourist offer of each sub-region. Finally, the whole voivodeship will benefit from being positioned as an attractive destination in the business tourism sector. Corporate clients already account for more than half of hotel guests in the region. The functioning of the Silesia Convention Bureau will bring many benefits", said Adam Wawoczny, CEO of the Silesian Tourist Organisation.

Formally functioning within the Silesian Tourist Organisation, the Silesia CVB will use its legal structure and build on its reputation and experience.

A unique and intriguing region, the Silesian Voivodeship is full of paradoxes making it unlike any other region of Poland. It includes the country's largest metropolis, a cluster of several cities inhabited by 2.2 million people, distinguished by a huge urban, economic and social potential. An important component of the region involves its rich and highly distinct cultural heritage. The voivodeship is a hub of heavy industry that left its mark not only on local residents, but also on the natural landscape. The revitalization of post-industrial areas makes it possible to simultaneously preserve the diverse past and take a bold step into the future. At the same time, the Silesian Voivodeship of today is one of the greenest regions in Poland. Numerous forests, landscape parks and nature reserves stand in striking contrast to heavily urbanized areas. *PCB POT, prep. MK*

Aneta Książek appointed Head of Poland Convention Bureau

A few months ago, Poland Convention Bureau has become an independent office within the structures of Polish Tourism Organisation. Aneta Książek has been appointed Poland Convention Bureau's head under the direct supervision of Marcin Różycki, Vice-President of Polish Tourism Organisation (PTO).

"In 2022 Poland Convention Bureau of Polish Tourism Organisation celebrated its 20th anniversary. Over these two decades, we have witnessed a great transformation and professionalization of the Polish meetings industry. Today, it is time for more changes. This means continuing to work with the industry and on well-known projects, but also looking for the best ways to influence Poland's competitiveness in the VUCA era. I believe that Poland Convention Bureau will be up to its new tasks and will continue contributing to the development of Poland as Central Europe's leader for meetings and events", says Marcin Różycki, Vice-President of PTO.

Aneta Książek is closely identified with PTO and its efforts to promote Poland and develop the meetings industry. Between 2008 and 2018, she held the position of chief conference specialist at PTO. In 2015, she gained 10 months of experience working at PTO's Foreign Centre in Brussels, where she was in charge of promoting both leisure tourism and the meetings industry. She earned her Destination Pro certification in 2012 (a professional development programme aimed at those working to promote destinations attractive to business visitors). In addition, she became a Certified Incentive Specialist (CIS) in 2013, received Healthcare Meeting Compliance Certificate (HMCC) in 2015, and completed the Event Management (Stage I) training in August 2016. From 2019 to October 2021, Aneta was head of Poland Convention Bureau at PTO. Since 7 June 2021, she has been an honorary member of the SITE Poland Association.

PCB POT, prep. MK

Photo.: Adobe Stock

WARSAW named European BEST DESTINATION 2023

Warsaw received the prestigious title of Europe's most attractive tourist destination in 2023 in the European Best Destinations competition. 142,000 travellers from more than 130 countries all over the world voted for the Polish capital.

Warsaw triumphed over the second-ranked Athens with 91,000 votes. The Polish city simultaneously collected the largest number of votes since the competition was launched 14 years ago – 4,000 more than the previous record holder, the Portuguese city of Porto supported by 138,000 votes back in 2017.

Representatives of the Warsaw Tourist Organisation emphasise that the title will reinforce Warsaw's tourism brand on the international stage and allow for more effective promotional and marketing undertakings scheduled for the upcoming months.

European Best Destinations is an organisation founded in 2009 to promote tourism and culture of European cities and regions. Warsaw was also recognized and distinguished in four other categories: Best Cultural Destination, Best Destination for Food Lovers, Safest Destinations in Europe, and Best Destinations for a city break. *MK*

ICCA LAUNCHES 2023-2025 strategy

Legacy, DEI, sustainable development and business focus are the main pillars of the newly established strategic plan of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) for 2023-2025.

Due to global challenges, it was agreed that this time the plan would cover three rather than five years. This solution is intended to provide flexibility making it possible to more effectively adapt the association's services to meetings industry's changing expectations. An analysis of core trends and needs identified three strategic goals.

The first one involves increasing member benefits and services through i. a. introducing at least one new benefit per year, with a clear and measurable return on investment, and expanding into international non-association events to increase the ICCA database.

The second goal focuses on regional expansion and membership growth through activities, such as development of independent regional strategies tailored to the needs of members in a particular region, implementation of a new membership model, and creation of new partnerships.

Finally, the third goal revolves around reinforcing ICCA's perception as a proactive and sustainable organisation. It mostly refers to stimulating digital transformation and refreshing the communications strategy to engage members and key stakeholders more effectively.

Based on insights gained during the pandemic, four core pillars have also been developed as a reference point for the association's operations. They are legacy, equity, diversity & inclusion, sustainability, as well as business focus. *AG*

ROUTES EUROPE 2023
aviation industry in Łódź

Several dozen airlines from all over the world attended this year's Routes Europe forum. Europe's largest and most prestigious event of the aviation industry was staged in Łódź on 9-11 May, with *THINK MICE* as its media partner.

The event involved more than 1,200 delegates, including representatives of about 300 airports and 100 airlines, such as American Airlines, Lufthansa, Etihad Airways, SAS, British Airways, Air France, Easy Jet, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, Ryanair, as well as Wizz Air. The three-day programme encompassed numerous meetings, presentations, debates, discussion panels, evening networking, and additional highlights and trips, including a special VIP package.

In addition to the conference section, the forum also featured two evening events. The Welcome Reception was intended as Routes Europe's ceremonious opening promoting the hosting city, partners and sponsors. Routes Europe 2023 Awards celebrated airports, airlines and tourism authorities with the greatest impact on the development of Europe's aviation sector in 2022.

Launched in 2006, Routes Europe has already been staged twice in Poland – in Warsaw and Kraków. The list of its hosts also includes Sofia, Porto, Prague, Toulouse, Budapest, Marseilles, Belfast, Bilbao, Hannover, and Bergen. *MK*

Accor launches
new structure

Originally announced in July 2022, Accor's new organisation of its brands has now been successfully implemented. The change is intended to accelerate growth and better address market developments to deliver the highest possible levels of service.

Under the leadership of Sébastien Bazin, Group Chairman & CEO, and Jean-Jacques Morin, Group Deputy CEO, as of 1st of January 2023 Accor's operations have been relying on two divisions: Premium, Midscale & Economy (including venues operating under brands such as Pullman, Swissotel, Mövenpick, Novotel, Mercure, and ibis hotels) and Luxury & Lifestyle (structured around four brand collections: Raffles & Orient Express, Fairmont, Sofitel MGallery & Emblems, and Ennismore). Both are supported by a Group Management Board and a Global Shared Platform delivering expertise and services to the two divisions including Digital, Technology and Procurement. *MK*

POT **announces 2023-2024 recommendations**

Photo: Katarzyna Cegłowska

7 convention bureaux, 13 incentive travel companies and 17 processional congress organisers received recommendations of Poland Convention Bureau POT for 2023-2024.

For almost 20 years run by POT, the programme of recommending PCOs, ITCs, and convention bureaux is aimed at professionalizing the Polish meetings industry through developing conference services, enhancing knowledge and skills, and applying international cooperation to strengthen the status of meeting professionals. "I am pleased that PCB POT continues the recommendation programme, which plays an important role in attracting international events to Poland. It is worth emphasising that its regulations were updated and adapted to the new reality of hybrid and digital conferences", said Aneta Książek, Head of PCB POT.

The recommended entities are provided with PCB POT's support and promotion, such as information in presentations for foreign organisers, on a website and in social media. In addition, distinguished organisers are invited to participate in various initiatives staged by POT, such as international trade fairs, familiarization trips, workshops, as well as training sessions.

Recommended Convention Bureaux

- Gdansk Convention Bureau
- Kraków Convention Bureau
- Łódź Convention Bureau
- Mazovia Convention Bureau
- Poznań Convention Bureau
- Warsaw Convention Bureau
- Convention Bureau – Wrocław

Recommended PCOs

- Allegro Brand Experience Agency
- Argentum Event • Business Service Galop
- Creative Poland • DMC Poland
- Event-factory • FSWO
- Furnel Travel International
- Grupa MTP – Poznań Congress Center
- Jan-Pol DMC Poland • Jordan Group
- Mazurkas Congress Management
- PolandPops Meetings & Incentives
- Relago • Symposium Cracoviense
- Targi w Krakowie • Tarifa Corporate Events

Recommended ITCs

- Allegro Brand Experience Agency
- Argentum Event • DMC Poland
- Furnel Travel International
- Intercrac DMC • Jan-Pol DMC Poland
- Jordan Group • Mazurkas DMC Poland
- PolandPops Meetings & Incentives
- Tarifa Corporate Events
- Travel Projekt DMC Poland
- Vengo DMC Poland
- Wowland – Polka Travel

MK

New major events brought to Poland

On 24-26 April 2024 Kraków will become the first Polish city to host the Global Conference of Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI). European Cyclists' Federation (ECF) announced that the 2025 edition of its Velo-city world cycling summit will for the first time be staged in Poland – Gdańsk, to be precise.

The longest-running international conference on dementia usually attracts about 1,200 onsite and virtual attendees from more than 120 countries in all corners of the world. Polskie Stowarzyszenie Pomocy Osobom z Chorobą Alzheimera (Polish Alzheimer's Association) won the bid supported by Symposium Cracoviense. "We are delighted to co-host this prestigious conference for the first time in Poland. We strongly believe that it is an enormous opportunity to share knowledge and experience between people with dementia, policy makers, family carers, and medical professionals. I am looking forward to welcoming conference participants in Kraków in 2024", said Zbigniew Tomczak, President of Polish Alzheimer's Association.

The annual Velo-city conference draws up to 1,400 guests from all over the world. In addition, more than 250 experts and speakers and about 70 exhibitors will travel to Gdańsk. The programme will encompass keynote speeches, workshops, technical tours, and social events, as well as discussions on issues such as cycling infrastructure, politics, culture, safety, behaviour change, and the role of cycling in achieving urban sustainability. Previous editions of the event were hosted in, i. a. Berlin, Copenhagen, Vienna, Dublin, Seville, Nantes, Adelaide, Arnhem/Nijmegen, Taipei, as well as Rio de Janeiro. *IK*

wide

open for meetings

Kraków: when can we expect you?

A business event in a state-of-the-art facility, in a city with a thousand years of history in the background? A "wow" effect guaranteed! However, the MICE industry is not only about spectacular settings - it is also about professional organisation, state-of-the-art technology, comfortable accommodation and, last but not least, a range of leisure activities. Kraków offers all this - and much more.

The former capital of Poland, located in the southern part of the country, successfully combines the challenges of today with its centuries-old heritage. The infrastructure dedicated to events here, woven into the historic fabric of the city, impresses with both its modern design and functionality. It makes it possible to organise a wide variety of events: trade fairs, conferences, congresses, symposia or business meetings, all of which have high quality as their common denominator.

Venues such as the TAURON Arena Kraków, the EXPO Kraków International Trade Fair and Congress Centre, the CKF_13 Fabryczna Conference Centre or the ICE Kraków Congress Centre can host events with thousands of participants, as well as more intimate ones. ICE Kraków boasts excellent recommendations: in 2017, it hosted the 41st session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, and in 2022, it was selected as the location for the 61st ICCA Congress. Event organisers can count on the support of the city's Kraków Convention Bureau.

The city's extensive range of hotels and its accessibility is an important asset: more than 12,500 rooms in almost 190 hotels, many of which are boutique, and air links to all major European cities. Enthusiasts of active leisure and wellness, lovers of culture and art, but also foodies - there is something for everyone and you will only be left with regret having spent too little time here.

Experience
Kraków.
Visit **Małopolska.**

European Funds Regional Programme
Republic of Poland
MAŁOPOLSKA
European Union European Regional Development Fund

Using LinkedIn to advance your career and grow your MICE business

You might not know it but LinkedIn, this year turning 20, is actually older than Facebook. It is not only a platform for job hunters, but also a powerful tool for building a professional network and promoting your business, personal brand or destination. With 900 million users (according to the company's data, LinkedIn is adding three new members every second!), it is also one of the most important networking tools in the MICE industry. Therefore, it is crucial to get familiar with the platform and use it properly.

It is never too late to become an active user of LinkedIn. If you are completely new to the website or use it sporadically, here's an overview of its 2023 offer.

A WIDE RANGE OF OPTIONS

Let us start with the basics. LinkedIn offers a free profile with a banner and a profile photo, an option of creating a CV listing your professional experience, skills and education, and a feature allowing you to showcase your professional services and offer. You can also link your website and other social media. In addition, LinkedIn members can post, add photos, videos and articles, create polls, events, and even newsletters. LinkedIn profiles represent individuals, while pages represent organisations (Company Page) and their brands and business lines (Showcase Page). The list of page admin categories includes Super admin, Content admin, Curator, as well as Analyst.

Last but not least, LinkedIn offers a number of other features as part of the paid LinkedIn Premium and Sales Navigator versions, with targeting and paid campaigns at the top of the list.

BUILDING YOUR PROFILE

When getting started on LinkedIn, be sure to spend some time optimizing your private profile or company page, filling in all the available fields, using keywords, and adding photos to diversify your content. This will certainly make the profile more searchable. It is also highly recommended to customize the URL of your LinkedIn profile or page. If all of this is done properly, Google will index all provided information in its resources. As a result, your profile will get to the top of Google searches. I do not think anyone needs to be convinced about the benefits of such positioning.

Another noteworthy option involves switching LinkedIn profile to the so-called creator mode, which gives you access to a whole suite of new tools and features, including the ability to add hashtags to highlight the topics you are known for talking about, display the number of followers or suggest new connections. Creators with an audience base of more than 150 followers and/or connections get access to hosting audio-only live events (LinkedIn Audio Event), live video (LinkedIn Live) and creating newsletters.

Let us keep in mind that the 90-9-1 rule well-known in most online communities is also applicable for LinkedIn. This means that 90% of users only consume content ('lurkers'), 9% contribute from time to time, and only 1% participate a lot and focus on high-quality posts. Similarly to TikTok or Instagram, LinkedIn obviously has its share of influencers that - to make a distinction between B2C and B2B - should be referred to as B2B influencers or thought leaders.

NETWORK OF CONTACTS

Now let us consider the effective methods of building your professional network on LinkedIn. Direct messaging other users can be done in three ways. The first one involves sending a message to establish a relationship with your potential connection. The second one is to send a connection request, and follow it with a message after your invitation gets accepted. The third way is a premium feature that allows you to directly message

HOW TO WRITE THE PERFECT LINKEDIN POST ABOUT A MICE EVENT?

When planning the post, be sure to start preparations before you actually participate in the event. You can write the main section earlier and add photos, videos or interesting quotes while attending or just before posting.

- Share interesting content heard during a discussion panel or a presentation. Quote experts, show intriguing data or a case study.
- Remember to add one or many photos to ensure that the post stands out in the feed. It can be a selfie, a group photo taken at a stand, photos of experts, speakers on stage, or attractive slides. LinkedIn users like to see who they are dealing with.
- Add unique value by conveying your emotions, opinions, and recommendations.
- You can also list all the people you met during the event. Share the story of your professional relationship or present your mutual plans.
- Add 3-5 hashtags connected with the post's content (for example, the hashtag of the event, the industry, your own and/or other related hashtags).
- Tag only those people or brands mentioned in the post that will be actually able to join the conversation in the comments section.
- Close your post with a call to action, for example by posing a question, encouraging readers to discuss your points or share the post with their network.

another LinkedIn member that you're not connected to. Regardless of which option you choose, after your request is accepted do not follow it by immediately sending an offer to the new connection. Instead, focus on building your expert image by posting valuable content, analysing hashtags or joining and actively participating in discussions on other profiles and pages. It is no secret that to be professional about your LinkedIn activities you need to make regular updates, be patient, and pursue a plan. It is a marathon, not a sprint and taking your time when building relationships will actually allow you to become more effective in attracting clients.

It is worth mentioning that first-degree connections on LinkedIn are automatically given access to any information displayed on your profile. Unlike Instagram, LinkedIn is not overflowing with content creators, making it easier to gain new followers. In addition, whenever you like or comment the post of another user, the original post appears in the feed of your followers. It also works the other way around - when other users like your posts, you get an opportunity to be on their radar and expand your reach.

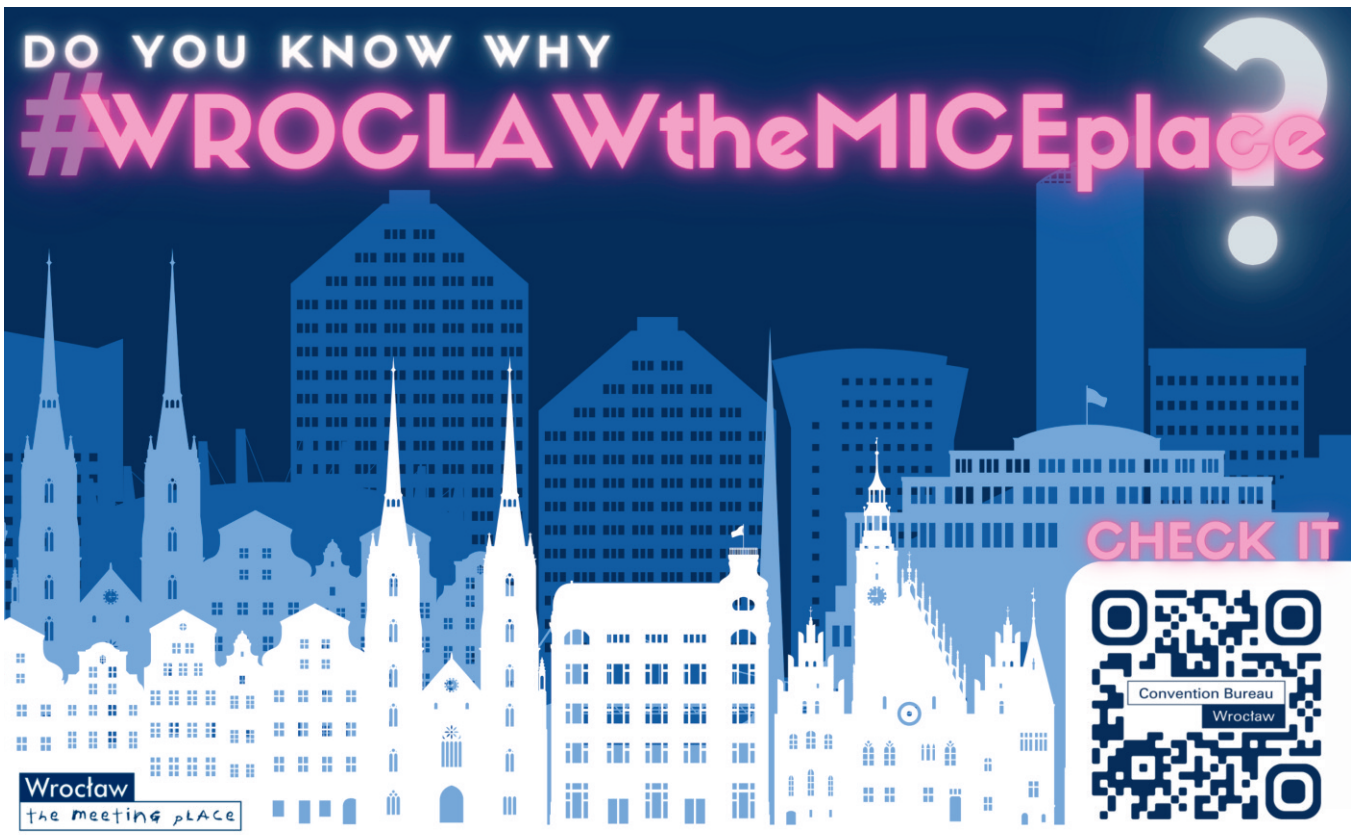
ENGAGING CONTENT

Unsure of what to post on LinkedIn? While my experience shows that posts with photos of people tend to be more popular, there is no rule determining what post users will like more at a given moment and which post the LinkedIn algorithm will share with a broader audience. On the other hand, it is worth bearing in mind that a post that quickly earns engagement (likes, comments, shares) is also more capable of getting more views. There are many myths about things you must and must not do on LinkedIn, but that is a whole different topic. Be sure to experiment and simultaneously measure the effectiveness of your actions. For this purpose, you can apply the platform's built-in analytics that will provide you with highly helpful data. It is also worth trying to use tools such as Shield App.

■ Jaroslaw Marciuk

AUTHOR

JAROSŁAW MARCIUK, or simply Jaro, was born in Gdańsk by the Baltic Sea. A social media enthusiast aware of their advantages and disadvantages, he specialises in topics related to destination marketing, social media and B2B influencer marketing. Currently Digital Marketing Chief Specialist at Poland Convention Bureau – Polish Tourism Organisation.
Also MICE blogger and content creator, his influencer campaigns include collaborating with brands such as National Geographic Channel, Turespaña, Haute-Garonne Tourisme, ING Bank, Stena Line, LG Global, Xiaomi, and Visit England. Passionate about mobile photography, Jarosław and his Instagram friends run the IgersPoland community. Jury member of the international Grand Mobile Photo contest. After five years in Great Britain (London and Cambridge), he returned to Poland and lives in Warsaw with his wife Alicja.



IT'S TIME TO REVISIT!

Prof. Justyna Kowalska, Local Conference Co-Chair and Governing Board Member of European AIDS Clinical Society (EACS), talks with Michał Kalarus about preparations for this year's European AIDS Conference in Warsaw, crucial reasons for Polish capital securing the event, and related sponsorship opportunities.

The biennial European AIDS Conference is the flagship event of European AIDS Clinical Society (EACS). What are the main goals you are planning to achieve through this year's edition?

The conference allows EACS to bring together Europe's eminent clinicians and scientists specializing in the field of HIV/AIDS. I do not think I have to explain how significant this is for the exchange of knowledge, experiences and latest updates on the clinical aspects of HIV infection.

This year's European AIDS Conference (#EACS2023) will take place in Warsaw on 18-21 October. The "It's time to revisit!" theme does not only refer to revisiting the Polish capital, but also to our goals and deliverables in the fight against the HIV epidemic and co-infections. Equal access to high healthcare standards, both in the EU and beyond, focus on marginalized populations, scaling up the efforts to halt the HIV transmission, and promoting access to educational programmes and harm-reduction strategies will be only some of the topics at the centre of our discussions.

The previous EACS conference staged in London in 2021 adopted the hybrid format. While it allowed for an in-person attendance, most delegates decided to attend virtually. What is the plan for this year's edition? What turnout are you expecting in Warsaw?

The forthcoming 19th European AIDS Conference will be primarily an onsite event focused on in-person attendance. We are expecting to host about 3,000-3,500 guests in Warsaw. At the same time, we are planning to provide

everyone interested with an online access to all the most important components of our event. In other words, we certainly encourage travelling to Poland but simultaneously maintain an online option for attendees who for various reasons will be unable to appear in person in Warsaw.

We should keep in mind that success of all conferences and congresses depends on communicated content and networking, the opportunity to establish new relationships. This is why the European AIDS Conference is expected to be an information-sharing hub for all participants – clinicians, scientists, researchers, activists, and many other categories. It is intended to help them gain knowledge, build a contact list, and open up new perspectives. This message is communicated through our bulletins, newsletters, social media, conference ambassadors, as well as promotional activities at similar events staged on an international level.

How exactly do preparations for a major event such as the European AIDS Conference look like? How early did they start?

EACS is working closely with the K.I.T. Group, a professional congress organiser (PCO), on all activities related to the conference's development. The latter's representatives pay attention to all the essential details, from signing contracts to promotional undertakings. Our journey aimed at staging this year's edition of the European AIDS Conference has actually started already three years ago with preparing the bid, followed by selecting the host venue (and signing a corresponding agreement), business talks with sponsors, as well as local activities conducted together with Warsaw Convention Bureau.

Through our long-term experience gained when working on its earlier editions and familiarity with key expectations of attending delegates, each time we try to improve the conference by introducing intriguing new features and innovations, both as regards content and programme's shape and structure. I am talking here about longer breaks enabling more effective networking opportunities and slightly shorter sessions to increase the quality of educational content.

What proved to be decisive for Warsaw securing this year's conference?

Back in 2003 Warsaw hosted Eastern Europe's first European AIDS Conference. Exactly 20 years later, we decided the timing is right to come back to the Polish capital, especially as out of all the 18 EACS conferences staged so far only 2 were brought to Central and Eastern Europe. In addition, Warsaw is the region's centrally-located scientific, political and cultural hub with easy access to destinations all over the world. Last but not least, it is highly attractive for delegates and sponsors from the viewpoint of their interests corresponding to the thematic range covered by our association.

Since you have mentioned sponsors… Their presence is crucial for associations and drives a significant number of their events, including conferences and congresses. What sponsorship opportunities can you offer to your partners during the 19th European AIDS Conference in Warsaw? Why should they become interested in this event?

All of the more than 3,000 participants attend our conference because they are interested in gaining knowledge and information; in other words, to explore the greatest number of helpful resources. Moreover, let us not forget that the European AIDS Conference can be described as a hub attracting the world's top HIV specialists. As a rule, they enjoy spending time at an accompanying exhibition where they learn more about the best propositions, whether on a stand or in networking areas.

When investing in your own stand to create a peaceful environment for hosting talks and showcasing your brand, standing out from the crowd is obviously a priority. We are perfectly aware of this and therefore prepare the exhibition floorplan to make each stand easily accessible. Moreover, our offer involves sponsored sessions allocated with the general conference programme. In consequence, we give our partners an opportunity to pass on all the key information to delegates and reach their audience in a highly effective manner. But there is more. The list of options also includes, i.a. eBag inserts and a wide range of other solutions that uniquely and creatively seize the attention of guests and make it easier to stay memorable.

We have been talking about the European AIDS Conference, but this is not the only event in your calendar…

Indeed, we will hold the HIV Summer School in Lisbon on 4-8 September. The five-day residential course is designed for clinicians, who wish to deepen their knowledge about all aspects of HIV medicine and research methodology. EACS is simultaneously also producing new guidelines for the management of people living with HIV in Europe, whose launch is planned for October. The European AIDS Conference will feature a dedicated workshop intended to address the standards of HIV care. In addition, the Women Against Viruses in Europe (WAVE) group will meet before the Warsaw conference to discuss the most pressing topics concerning women and HIV. WAVE will also stage the 3 WAVE in Ukraine online workshop, continuing medical educational courses for Ukrainian specialists involved in the treatment, care and support of women living with HIV (infectious disease specialists, gynaecologists, and paediatricians). The EACS Young Investigators is working on the monthly virtual Journal Club and a one-day pre-conference event focused on providing practical clinical skills and advice. Last but not least, we will launch the formal Diploma in HIV Medicine certification exam and run the year-round Medical Exchange Programme.

■ Michał Kalarus

An introduction to **brain-friendly neuroevents**

Event organisers have for a long time now been trying to make their agendas as a diverse as possible. After all, we already match menus to dietary preferences and adjust amenities to the gender and physical wellbeing of participants. Inclusion of diversity in a neurological context, understood as the diversity of human brain, should not be perceived as another event design trend, but rather a natural consequence of our growing awareness of human nature.

Obviously, all of us are different in how we think, move, hear, see, understand, process information, communicate, and build relationships. Therefore, we cannot simply assume everyone's perception is identical – that is, as long as we really want to create effective events. This is exactly where the field of event psychology comes in, a combination of social, cognitive and economic psychology, neuropsychology, and even personal development psychology.

PSYCHOLOGY OF EVENTS

The job of an event psychologist is to support the event organiser in designing brain-friendly and neurodivergent events that encourage learning or team building, as well as all processes affecting engagement and interest shown in each project. Another responsibility involves helping supervise the whole undertaking, taking into account the area of mental health.

Psychology of events tends to be overlooked because of its common perception as elusive. It is certainly not as easily quantifiable as other tools and methods used to plan events. You can compare it to a comfortable armchair - it seems to be cosy, but we cannot quite say why. Event participants also feel comfortable and safe, enjoying a positive experience, but are unable to pinpoint the main reasons for it. Perhaps it is due to the numerous information points that prevent them for feeling lost, the interactive and brief sessions or the breaks that are long enough to meet all needs. In addition, relaxation rooms are provided and organizer's pre-event communication informed participants what to expect. In other words, there is a long list of factors that contribute to considerably boosting event effectiveness and attendee satisfaction – you can call them "neurologistics".

AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS

An event involves working with real people at the level of the project team, business partners and, finally, the invited guests. According to Megan Henshall of Google, event planners should devote more time to understand participants and take care of their needs rather than to create "wow" effects that are often based on uninformed assumptions. This brings us to the controversial heart of the matter: namely, the

question who we actually design events for? To satisfy the whims of clients, fulfil the ambitions of an agency or for the participants? How can we measure a project's effectiveness when the development process, often already at the earliest stage, creates an environment that does not provide the right conditions for team integration, relationship building or cognitive processes?

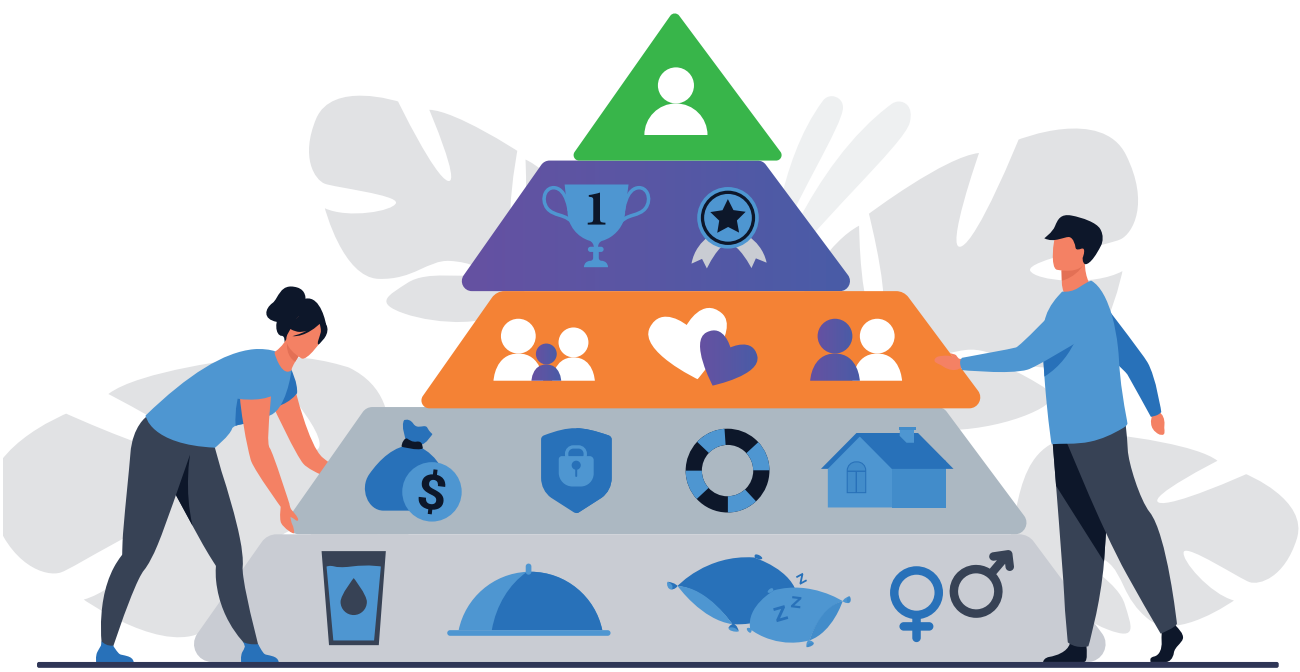
Philip Berners, an event management professional whose clients included the Queen of England, once said that an organiser should meet audience expectations that are formed even before they arrive to an event. Anticipating a meeting, the human brain creates various scenarios and launches an onslaught of questions: Will there be anyone that I know? Will I look good? Will I be able to establish any business relationships? As a participant, will I be required to engage in games and activities, and thus be subjected to social evaluation? Will I feel comfortable?

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY

This is precisely what makes Abraham Maslow, author of the famous concept of a pyramid representing human needs, increasingly prominent in event planning. After all, his theory states that our actions are motivated by a certain hierarchy that needs to be satisfied in progress from basic to complex. According to Maslow, to satisfy a higher set of needs, such as building relationships, belonging or self-actualization, you first need to meet our lower needs. Let us examine it more closely with the help of some examples.

If we organize a content-centred event, such as a conference, we mostly want the participants to absorb knowledge, get inspired, broaden horizons, and make new connections by becoming involved in networking. At the same time, numerous conferences continue to dedicate only 15 minutes to coffee breaks. This is definitely not enough to find time to establish business relationships after you take care of all your basic needs, such as going to the bathroom or buying coffee and cookies. In other words, participants face an unfortunate dilemma: return to the conference room hungry, with a full bladder or feeling guilty that they did not manage to strike up a conversation.

Now let us see how all of this looks from the perspective of neuroscience… Cerebral cortex or, to be precise, frontal and temporal lobes is the human brain region responsible for acquiring knowledge, becoming open to new ideas, and building relationships. It has been proven that an unsatisfied physiological need prevents the lobes from fulfilling their function and makes them uncooperative, blocking focus and information processing skills. The same thing happens when we do not feel comfortable or safe. Imagine a team-building event staged when a company is affected by changes or poor employee relations. The lack of a sense of safety will not allow brain lobes to function effectively, create positive engagement or build an emotional bond with a company or colleagues. Bearing these factors in mind, event organisers should become highly familiar with the situation in each company and its internal relations. This knowledge will make it possible to develop a successful integration programme that will



take into account building safety and relationships, and not only entertainment.

Speaking of company events, it is impossible not to mention the crucial role played by the whole agenda, and not only selected types of activity. A great example is provided by a trip that pays attention to both the education and development of employees and their integration. It is not uncommon to stage a morning workshop after an evening spent on team building, but it is unlikely to be effective when the brains of attendees are unwilling to participate. After all, the point is not to simply spend several hours sitting in a lecture hall, but to actually facilitate development and efficiently transfer specific information.

IRRITATION VS. REWARD

In addition to frontal lobes, event organisers should keep in mind two other important regions of the human brain: the amygdala and dopamine, which plays a major role in the reward pathway. The main function of the amygdala is in processing emotional responses, including irritation, anger, and stress. It cannot be easily controlled, which is worth considering when planning route to a host venue and informing guests about the availability of parking facilities. After all, you will not help keep the amygdala in check by letting your event slip into information chaos or asking participants to wait in line for buffets, bars, or toilets. The reward system, in turn, is where the dopamine is released – the molecule of 'wanting', expectations and motivation, also known as the molecule of happiness or reward. Identified as the pathway to pleasure or even euphoria, the dopamine 'reward' can be caused by having a nice meal, listening to great music or learning something new. Competition, gambling and storytelling are also known to release dopamine. Being aware of dopamine's positive impact on an event's perception, it is highly recommended to think over how to use the mechanisms of its stimulation.

What else can be done to take advantage of these favourable brain mechanisms? Try awing your event participants and prepare something that will captivate them, allowing positive emotions to take over their bodies. After all, magnificent scenery is not the only thing capable of stirring amazement; you can feel it when you encounter something unknown that you might not even understand, but really want to explore. The feeling in question is also caused by the mechanism of a positive surprise or when trying something for the first time in your life. As being amazed causes you to focus on your surroundings, and not on yourself, it helps you become better at building social relationships and gaining new knowledge. In other words, it is one of the key factors driving learning and remembering.

FRIENDLY ECOSYSTEM

It should be quite apparent by now that the role of an event organiser goes beyond injecting the 'wow' factor into an event and its efficient arrangement. Today, it needs to involve many other components, among which it is particularly important to develop an ecosystem that is friendly for the human brain and emotions. It will noticeably boost the chances of achieving business goals through staging an event. Another crucial aspect encompasses the creation of an environment where each participant feels included and accepted. This is where neurodiversity comes in and sets the bar even higher. Discussions on diversity and inclusion often refer to people of different gender, race, religious beliefs, and sexual preferences. An often-overlooked aspect involves the needs of neurodivergent people, for example those on the autism spectrum, affected by attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), introverts, and highly sensitive persons. Nevertheless, examples from abroad are showing that planners are increasingly often taking these issues into account when organizing events. While the discussed group of people is commonly perceived as a minority, this is not necessarily true, as every third person in the world struggles with sensory challenges and 20% of the global population has been officially diagnosed as neurodivergent.

Through staging events that factor in the diversity of operations and needs, we can provide extraordinary experiences for all participants. This is an opportunity to create an inclusive environment where guests feel a certain sense of belonging and thus build deeper relationships with a company or a brand. However, this is only possible when we stop creating 'copy and paste' event offers or competing for the most spectacular solutions. We need to start designing events also in the mental and emotional sphere, based on what we learnt about humans and their behaviour.

Nina Żukowska

AUTHOR

NINA ŻUKOWSKA Strategy, creation and event marketing specialist with 17 years of practical experience, Nina has worked for the largest brands in Poland, executing events recognized by industry-centred competitions. Building education for many years, she conducts mentoring and offers consultancy services in the field of event marketing, event management, creativity, storytelling in events, and designing brain-friendly meetings. Nina runs the Event World educational platform and published five educational e-books aimed at the event sector. Passionate about neurodidactics, brain, social psychology and behavioural economics, she runs her own mentoring programme dedicated to the application of psychology in events.

If you became interested in neuroevents and would like to learn more about designing them and the solutions needed to develop brain-friendly events, the *Neuroeventy – jak projektować wydarzenia przyjazne dla mózgu* (Neurovents – The Art of Designing Brain-Friendly Events) e-book available at https://swiateventow.com/produkt/e-book-neuroeventy/ is essential reading.

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The Lublin Conference Centre is one of the most modern conference facilities in Poland, its beauty is determined by moderation and proportions. In the classical era, perfection was the most important thing, while nowadays we focus on optimality and solutions that can be adapted to various arrangements. LCC is a modern classic - a harmonious, unified, coherent space. Covering an area of over 13,000 m^2, the building has 11 conference rooms, business centre rooms and a spacious 20-metre-high glass atrium.

AFRICA AIMS TO EXCEED EXPECTATIONS

Representatives of the African meetings industry declare that they are motivated to develop their sector and exceed pre-pandemic levels. For business guests visiting the continent, this promises an increasingly intriguing offer, enhanced infrastructure, and greater business opportunities.

The coronavirus pandemic dealt a blow to the African tourism and MICE industry. At the same time, it made everyone recognize that its recovery needs to happen as soon as possible, which spells good news for event organisers and customers. While the continent has especially high hopes for major conferences and congresses, this does not mean that planners handling more intimate events and incentive trips have nothing to look forward to. On the contrary, the increasingly close cooperation between particular countries makes development of diverse programmes combining highlights and stays in several different destinations no longer particularly problematic. In addition, mention is due to the promotion of less-explored sites and the popularization of CSR and legacy-centred offer.

REACH FOR THE TOP

To acknowledge the crucial role played by tourism in accelerating Africa's economic recovery, you only need to look at data covering the sector in South Africa. In January-November 2022 the number of arrivals grew by 151.9%, reaching the level of 5 million tourists. While the greatest number of guests travelled from other African countries, close to 780,000 visitors came from Europe, which is a quite good result. Despite a record-breaking increase of 227%, there were fewer visitors from North and South America – slightly more than 285,000. These numbers are much better than the ones recorded in 2021, but unfortunately remain below the pre-pandemic levels of 2019. Still, what really matters is the upward trend that has a chance to continue this year as well. In addition, internal market data are also highly optimistic. In the same period of January-November 2022, domestic trips in South Africa – leisure and MICE kind – reached the level of 29.8 million (an increase of 139.4% compared to the same period in 2021). As a result, broadly defined tourism industry earned R84.2 billion, over 172% more than in the year before. In the context of the MICE sector alone, business events secured for 2023-2025 (predominantly conferences and congresses) will generate about R228 million (15.6 million USD) for the South African economy.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

These numbers successfully convinced authorities and decision makers – not only in South Africa, but also in most destinations of the continent – about the great significance that tourism, including the meetings industry, has on local economy. In consequence, they decided to show more interest in the sector's faster development, leading to a wide range of infrastructural investments and facilitations for event organisers (related to visas, financial backing, and consultancy support). For example, Mauritius introduced the so-called MICE Incentive Programme. Depending on an event's duration and group size, MICE customers are entitled to from Rs. 100,000 to Rs. 200,000 (2,000-4,000 USD) and a VAT refund. Working on a comprehensive national MICE strategy, Uganda is heavily investing in event venues, as demonstrated by the launch of a conference centre in Munyonyo (part of the metropolitan area of Kampala). Developed in cooperation with Speke Resort, the venue has maximum capacity of 5,000 guests. "The strength of the meetings industry lies in its socio-economic impact. Business events accelerate the growth of our economies", admits Mellon Tukeikiriza, senior marketing

Photos: South African Tourism

officer, Uganda Convention Bureau. A similar message is sent by, i. a. representatives of Botswana, Ghana, Rwanda, Tanzania, or the South African province of Gauteng. "It is very clear for us that regular high-quality events in Gauteng constitute a prominent economic driving force", confirms Sthembiso Dlamini, CEO, Gauteng Tourism Authority.

GREEN EVENTS

Clients of MICE events should be particularly interested in the fact that planning and staging green events is also gaining in importance in Africa, inspired by the ideas of environmental protection but respecting the interests of local communities (including those of the economic kind). This approach is fast becoming a standard in numerous destinations and a similar thing is happening in international associations and corporations. "It is not only about selling conference spaces, highlights, and catering. The question is what kind of legacy we wish to leave behind and what experiences we wish to offer our delegates", explains Sven Bossu, CEO, International Association of Convention Centres (AIPC). The reason is simple: the meetings industry clearly no longer wishes to be associated with activities contributing to the degradation of natural resources, food waste, production of significant waste volumes, and greenhouse gas emissions. While events do exert a great impact on the environment and residents of a given destination, the point is to make this influence as positive as possible. "Sustainable development has probably become one of the most important topics we need to tackle today. This is a complex and frequently controversial issue that needs the right approach along with numerous discussions, debates and even arguments. Some even wonder if our industry should exist at all. The answer is obviously 'yes'. We should emphasise that events help create a global platform for education, knowledge sharing and promoting attitudes aimed at, among other goals, the implementation of increasingly environmental activities conducted in the spirit of corporate social responsibility", says Senthil Gopinath, CEO, International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA).

BUILDING A BRAND

Aware of the expectations of present-day clients, more and more destinations across Africa have started to employ sustainability not only in the case of the most obvious goals related to environmental protection and supporting local communities, but also to build their own brands and develop an offer for potential customers. This trend is especially important in Africa where high priority should be given to both the implementation of ecological solutions and meeting the needs of local residents.

A great example is the abovementioned South Africa, where more and more sustainable programmes are implemented year by year. As part of its internally developed Bid Support Programme, South Africa National Convention Bureau (SANCB) guarantees both financial and non-financial support (related to, i.e. promotion, know-how transfer, and mediation in negotiations with recommended PCOs and DMCs) aimed at organisers of international business events, as well as emphasises the need to introduce components connected with sustainable development, CSR, and the legacy approach. Most importantly, it helps effectively implement these assumptions. "Activities of this kind can take on many forms. Very often they simply consist of inviting representatives of local academic and scientific communities to participate in an international congress. Both sides benefit thanks to mutual learning and sharing knowledge and experiences. In addition, we suggest following the example of the latest Meetings Africa and setting up a so-called Sustainable Village, whose area is used to showcase the products of local artists and craftsmen. Event attendees can not only shop, but also learn more about items – how they were made, what is their backstory, etc. At the same time, they gain one-of-a-kind souvenirs that cannot be found anywhere else", explains Zinhle Nzama, acting CEO, SANCB. Finally, many CSR activities are tailored to regions hosting events. The list includes both more straightforward undertakings, such as renovating school buildings, visiting local villages or providing financial support, and more advanced environmental and social projects that continue to be carried out long after the main event wraps up. MK

PUTTING COOPERATION FIRST

Michał Kalarus sat down with Zinhle Nzama, Acting Chief Convention Bureau Officer at South Africa National Convention Bureau (SANCB), to discuss the MICE industry in Africa, the power of cooperation, development plans, and smart specializations of regions.

What is the current condition of Africa's meetings industry? How did the pandemic impact the continent's business approach?

The meetings industry, both in South Africa and the whole of Africa, is already doing fine and keeps on developing. Obviously, the pandemic took a heavy toll on us, but we are making up for lost time and things are certainly looking better than they did a year ago. However, this does not detract from the fact that a lot has changed. We continue to learn new things, launch new products, as well as modify itineraries to keep them attractive and ensure they provide the right kind of experience for the participants and correspond with their slightly modified needs.

However, I believe that the key lesson we have all learnt from the pandemic-related crisis is that we finally became aware of the major significance of cooperation on the level of the entire continent. Earlier we had our share of highs and lows, with particular countries often competing with each other. Things are different now – we cooperate and support each other, as this approach makes it easier to make great things happen. We find it easier to draw the attention of international meeting planners and secure the events they oversee. This new trend is highly beneficial for everyone involved. A single country working on its own would not be able to yield such satisfying results.

Are you referring to the development and promotion of a joint offer?

Among other things. For example, a conference hosted by South Africa can easily incorporate a trip to Mozambique or Zimbabwe, enabling delegates to experience diverse highlights, explore the offer of other destinations and thus recognize what the whole of Africa can offer as a continent. As local DMCs simultaneously operate in several countries of the region, they effortlessly compile intriguing and versatile itineraries of this kind. Still, our cooperation also involves sharing knowledge, experience and know-how, along with working on Africa's international positioning as a perfect MICE destination. In other words, we support each other in various areas. A great example is provided by the Meetings Africa trade show. This year's edition attracted representatives of numerous countries from all parts of the continent. All of them came to Johannesburg with a clear message – we are one and we speak in one voice.

South Africa's strategic goal is to attract at least 21 million tourists by 2030. What specific actions are you taking to achieve it? How crucial is MICE industry's involvement?

This is a seminal strategy we are implementing together with our partners. First, we defined constituent goals and identified the tourism market segments that can help us reach this target. We are also expanding the market of suppliers and the infrastructure; namely, we are upgrading the product. These are our key supply-related actions. In regard to securing the demand, a crucial role is indeed played by the MICE sector and a broadly defined event strategy. Promotion involves participating in all types of international events; we also identify cyclic major events – including conferences and congresses – that rotate around the world. Mention is due to the highly helpful cooperation with the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), which boasts a great database on meetings of this kind. We attend events to advertise South Africa and showcase its offer. In this way, we hope to catch the attention of potential customers and encourage them to host future editions of their events and conferences in our country. In addition, we consult current and past host destinations of the discussed category of events. We can thus develop superior offers (bids) and get to know the expectations of customers - what they care about, what they pay attention to. Mutual help and support are another example of the cooperation.

What industries bring their meetings to South Africa most frequently?

The range is exceptionally wide. Due to our offer and the smart specializations of regions, South Africa hosts an impressive number of science, medical, technological, and automotive events – you name it, we've got it. Moreover, in cooperation with buyers, we place great emphasis on the involvement of smart specializations. For example, the province of Limpopo is renowned for avocado orchards. As a result, it is an ideal place not only for clients specifically interested in avocados, but generally in agriculture and farming. It has already hosted various conferences dedicated to this subject matter. On the other hand, Cape Town is highly recommended for medical congresses, especially related to ophthalmology, as it is home to many top specialists in this field. Obviously, these are only some examples in a much longer list. We always try to become familiar with the specific character of a given group and use this basis to come up with a place that will ideally match the expectations. I am not only talking about standard tourist highlights, but also about value added in the form of research infrastructure or the availability of noteworthy speakers and participants. To sum up, sharing knowledge and know-how is the key. As experts on the capabilities and potential of our country, we can guarantee that everyone will find here something of interest.

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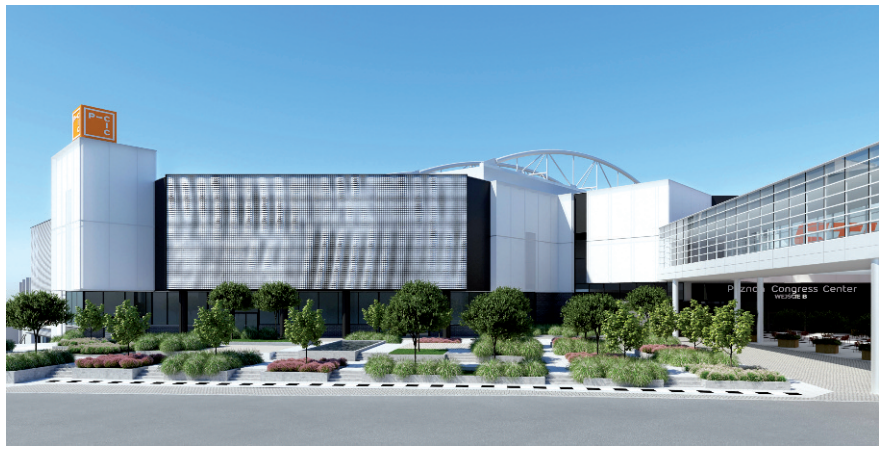


IN THE HEART OF EUROPE

Located halfway between Berlin and Warsaw, Poznań is well-connected with cities all over Europe. The capital of the Wielkopolska region can be reached by plane, train and car.

Superb location, a great selection of hotels, near-by airport and railway station, along with an impressive cultural and sports offer of the city make it a first-rate destination for professional conferences, congresses, trade fairs, and events.

Importantly, the main city of Wielkopolska is distinguished by a one-of-a-kind ambience. It is a place where you will meet friendly people, relax in unique spots, and enjoy coffee in the shadows of the Town Hall in the Old Town, with a wide range of atmospheric and charming restaurants, cafes and pubs to choose from.

MORE VENUES, MORE OPPORTUNITIES

Grupa MTP's Event Campus comprises a number of spacious exhibition halls, Poznań Congress Center, the green Wola Hippodrome, as well as the currently modernised ARENA POZNAŃ – Sports and Entertainment Hall. This portfolio offers a great field of possibilities for staging epic events and major international meetings. This is where you will find all the seminal sports events, concerts, trade fairs, and corporate events.

Each hall has been carefully designed to provide excellent conditions for exhibitors and event organisers. Their modern architecture, spacious interiors and innovative technical solutions create a perfect and enchanting event environment that is guaranteed to stand out from other places. With each of the venues offering a very wide range of possibilities, it can host events both for several and tens of thousands of participants.

POZNAŃ CONGRESS CENTER OFFERS HIGHLY FUNCTIONAL SPACE

A leading venue of the city, the vibrant, multi-functional, three-storey and architecturally diverse Poznań Congress Center offers more than 4,000 conference seats, a VIP zone, and a space dedicated to exhibitions and sponsor stands. Each year, it hosts

close to 200 various events from international congresses and conferences to corporate meetings, concerts by top music acts, theatrical productions, and trade fairs.

Clients can choose from among 25 fully equipped conference rooms with adjustable size and a spacious foyer of 2,250 m². A direct connection with a complex of four spacious halls makes it possible to stage conferences and events for close to 20,000 participants.

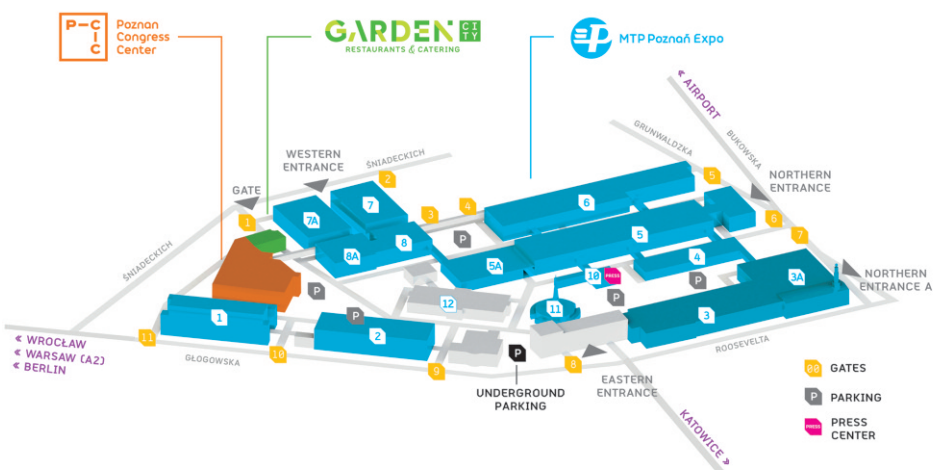
The new kinetic façade recently gained by Poznań Congress Center quickly became its flagship and recognizable feature. It is constructed of thousands of small tiles that respond to weather conditions and create a wave-like impression. Due to this component, the building successfully stands out among the city's urban landscape and has become one of the most distinct venues of MTP Poznań Expo.

A showpiece of the Poznań Congress Center, the Earth Hall plenary hall features capacity of close to 2,000, can be arranged in a variety of ways, and is fully adaptable to the requirements of plenary sessions, congresses, theatrical productions, concerts, as well as sports events.

PROFESSIONAL CONGRESS ORGANISER

The Poznań Congress Center team also operates as a Professional Congress Organiser. Poznań and the premises of MTP Poznań Expo already hosted events such as the FDI Annual World Dental Congress, 24th World Congress of Political Science, a National Assembly of the Parliament of Poland, COP14 and COP24 United Nations Climate Change Conference, as well as the IMPACT conference dedicated to economy and technology.

The conference offer is always developed in cooperation with Poznań Convention Bureau operating as part of Poznań Tourism Organisation.



HOTELS IN POZNAŃ

- 75 hotels
- 5,387 rooms
- 5 new hotels to launch in 2023-2025 with 4,000 guests
- accommodation in student dormitories - up to 10,000 beds

EXHIBITION HALLS – GROUND FLOOR

Hall 1	2,599 m²
Hall 2	2,478 m²
Hall 3	6,626 m²
Hall 3A	7,555 m²
Hall 4	3,626 m²
Hall 5	13,469 m²
Hall 5A	3,079 m²
Hall 6	5,000 m²
Hall 7	3,792 m²
Hall 7A	3,743 m²
Hall 8	2,481 m²
Hall 8A	2,801 m²
Hall 10	2,489 m²
Hall 11	2,041 m²

EXHIBITION HALLS – TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

- floor load capacity from 5 to 50 kPa
- ceiling suspension
- unlimited power supply options
- compressed air system
- water and sewage infrastructure
- Internet access

EARTH HALL IN NUMBERS

– Length	55 m
– Width	35 m
– Height	8.5 m
– Area	1,925 m²
– Foyer area	1,000 m²

THE PCO OFFER OF POZNAŃ CONGRESS CENTER INCLUDES:

» **top-class solutions for event organisers** – registration of participants, catering, 6 restaurants on MTP grounds, streaming and production of online events, organisation and technical support of events, congress office management, auxiliary staff, printing, stand design and construction, stage and stage decoration design and construction, ticket sales platform;

» **flexible approach to bookings and contracts** – with Poznań Congress Center handling the comprehensive organisation of an event, the company provides 80% of related services. This gives you flexibility in preparing contracts and budgeting your event;

» **functional space of the Congress Center and exhibition halls** fully adaptable to the needs of clients and available for a wide range of events;

» **cybersecurity**;

» **#virtualEvents** – the team provides solutions tailored to staging hybrid and virtual events. Every space can be adapted into a professional live streaming studio. In addition, Poznań Congress Center has both a qualitied team of technicians and equipment dedicated to implementing online conference services;

» **development of side events and post-conference tours**;

» **transportation**;

» **accommodation**.

POZNAŃ CONGRESS CENTER TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

– Total area: 16,000 m²
– 3 storeys
– 25 conference rooms
– 6 restaurants
– 4,000 conference seats
– Parking space for 1,850 vehicles

The FDI AWDC 2016 (…) has ended with great success. We are very proud to announce a total number of up to 11,730 participants. The great enthusiasm, the flexibility and the quality of service you all have provided to our congress was mentioned by numerous participants and by the FDI staff. State-of-the-art infrastructure and first-class services prove that MTP is a reliable and trustworthy partner for international events.

Steeve Girod, FDI World Dental Federation

NEW INVESTMENTS NEAR THE POZNAŃ CONGRESS CENTER

An event-friendly site recently opened under the name of Pewuki Square, this brand-new urban space is intended for hosting cultural events, concerts, meetings, as well as fairs. Cafes and restaurants will soon also join its offer. A modern three-level underground parking lot has 650 spaces.

WOLA HIPPODROME – PERFECT FOR OPEN-AIR EVENTS

Wola Hippodrome offers 18 ha of open land available for hosting sports events, picnics, concerts, and other outdoor events. A green area of 46 ha of outstanding natural and historical value, the Hippodrome is located in a wedge of the city's ring-like greenery system, by the Bogdanka river and on the western banks of Lake Rusałka creating a magnificent spot highly recommended for all types of outdoor meetings.

ARENA POZNAŃ – SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT HALL

ARENA Sports and Entertainment Hall is set in the centre of Poznań, surrounded by a large park area. A highly distinct landmark, it is well known among local and out-of-town attendees of concerts, sports events, children's events, fairs, trade fairs, as well as team-building meetings. At present, Grupa MTP is modernizing the iconic venue which will be able to host events for as many as 9,000 participants. The hall's reopening is planned for 2026.

SUSTAINABILITY ACTIVITIES

Grupa MTP is a member of United Nations Global Compact and the Net Zero Carbon Events team, a new industry initiative to address climate change. As a result, it implements a net zero plan following the guidelines of a roadmap aimed at the events industry. It offers green exhibition infrastructure focused on recycling and generating a smaller carbon footprint. Moreover, it implements a number of activities aimed at staging events in a sustainable way.

MICE TOURISM is our core business

Michał Kalarus talks with Vincent Dujardin, General Manager, Pullman Tbilisi Axis Towers, about the hotel's guests, its promotional methods, and the Georgian MICE market in general.

Has the MICE market in Georgia fully returned to pre-pandemic levels?
2022 was marked by Georgian meetings industry's gradual but noticeable recovery from the pandemic recession. More and more projects are emerging and it is clear that people are simply interested in meeting face to face. Companies and corporations, associations, and governmental organisations are commissioning all types of meetings. There is really a lot of them, which is obviously good news to us. As Pullman Tbilisi Axis Towers was launched in June 2022, we continue to be a fresh face in the local market. Despite this, thanks to a significant potential in providing services for business guests, including excellent infrastructure for conferences and events, the MICE sector has actually been our strongest business area in the first several months of operations. The ongoing trend is also certainly a consequence of Pullman's brand perception and its associations with business, including the MICE sector. This is our positioning.

What is the ratio of domestic customers to their foreign colleagues?
Up to now domestic guests have constituted the vast majority – more than 90%. They put our conference and event infrastructure to great use, but unfortunately rarely book overnight stays. This is hardly surprising; after all, most reside in Tbilisi or in its immediate vicinity. Still, for us the tendency is synonymous with lower profits, which is particularly evident in the case of more numerous groups. As a result, we are very much focused on securing more customers from abroad. I believe that 2023 will see improvements in this area. As I've mentioned earlier, we did not launch until June 2022 and before that there was not much need for intense promotion. However, things are different now and we are holding talks with international DMCs/PCOs and attending workshop sessions and industry exhibitions. All of these activities are intended to boost our recognizability and promote our offer. The efforts are already paying off with new inquiries coming in and first agreements signed. However, we need to keep in mind that international MICE events are usually planned several months in advance, even if lead times became much shorter after the pandemic. In other words, it will take some time until we see a greater number of inbound events.

Which destinations are you referring to in particular? Which guests are you trying to attract to Pullman Tbilisi Axis Towers?
Direct flights draw our attention to clients from Europe, naturally including Poland, but also to travellers hailing from the Persian Gulf and Israel. This is a result of our geographical location and the major potential distinguishing the markets in question. Neighbouring countries, with particular emphasis on Armenia and Azerbaijan, are also in the centre of our attention. However, their MICE sector is not advanced enough to generate a satisfying number of inbound business groups. A few years ago, I had a chance to work in Warsaw, where we could rely on customers from adjacent countries, mostly Germany, to provide us with strong support. Things are a bit different in the region of North Caucasus, forcing us to expand our scope.

Are we talking about participants of conferences, incentive trips or corporate events?
We focus on all branches of the MICE sector and treat all customers as equally valuable. Still, conferences and congresses are at the top of the list. From the hospitality perspective, they generate the highest revenue due to a relatively large number of participants and longer duration. In most cases, attendees spend 3 or 4 days onsite, while incentives and events are usually not that long. We also need to mention the great conference-related potential that Georgia owes to its convenient setting, a wide range of transport options, and an attractive price-to-quality ratio. On the other hand, it is also a great spot for incentives. A one-hour drive from Tbilisi will get you to numerous highlights that can act as a starting point for intriguing agendas. I also need to mention the continuously emerging brand-new products and improving infrastructure. Now that Georgians are fully aware of MICE sector's role as a crucial tourism segment, they are actively working on expanding the related offer.

DESTINED TO BE AN ENTREPRENEUR

AMERICAN POET MAYA ANGELOU ONCE SAID: "I'VE LEARNED THAT PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU SAID, PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU DID, BUT PEOPLE WILL NEVER FORGET HOW YOU MADE THEM FEEL". IS THERE A MORE APPROPRIATE LIFE MOTTO FOR PROFESSIONALS INVOLVED IN THE MICE INDUSTRY? IT CERTAINLY IS TRUE FOR DESHAWN WYNN, FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF WYNNING TOUCH EVENT DESIGN AND A BONA FIDE EVENT PLANNER. YOU ONLY NEED TO HEAR HER TALK ABOUT LIVE EVENTS AND THE ACCOMPANYING DESIGN PROCESS TO RECOGNIZE HER ENTHUSIASM.

DeShawn Wynn grew up in San Diego, California. Even though she has a sister and a brother, the noticeable age gap (10 and 7 years, respectively) made her feel like she was an only child. Still, this did not hold her back from assuming a highly independent attitude from an early age and from coming up with all sorts of great ideas… also of the business variety. All of this helped her reach the place where she is now – the owner of a highly successful event agency and an industry expert well-known and esteemed in the entire MICE community: "I am at a point in my business where I can truly look back at where I started and appreciate the journey. I am grateful for where I am as a company. And I am in awe at how my gifts are being used. I am seeing the results of many years of very hard work, and it is such a satisfying feeling". Still, Rome was not built in one day and the path to success was not a straight line…

Business acumen

There is no exaggeration in saying that that DeShawn became an entrepreneur at a very early age, already in the third grade, even before she truly became aware of the meaning of the word: "We had fruit trees on our property. My favorite was a kumquat tree. It was not a common fruit, and most of the kids at my school had never had them. I thought it would be great to introduce it to them, but of course not for free. My dad saw what I was doing, and brought out a scale that he had in the garage. He showed me how to place each baggie on the scale to make sure that they all weighed the same amount. He wanted me to make sure that everyone was getting the same amount for the price that I was charging. It was something that came natural to me, selling items to my friends and neighbors, was like play time to me".

After graduating from high school, it was time to tackle new, more demanding challenges. DeShawn decided to enroll in the business administration major at Pepperdine University. The reason for this choice was unquestionably pragmatic. While DeShawn was accepted into college, she was still trying to come up with ways to pay for her tuition, fees and campus housing. As luck would have it, precisely at this time a woman at local church started a scholarship fund to honor the memory of her son. The criteria was that you had to be a business major: "I thought it over for about 5 minutes and said 'Sure, why not, that sounds like something that will get me a job'".

Path to MICE

Speaking of work, while at Pepperdine University DeShawn got a job working in the wedding chapel at school. She now recalls it as her first real introduction to the hospitality industry: "As a kid, I thought that planning weddings would be fun. I would toy around with my last name and how I could use Wynn in the name of my

wedding planning company. After two years of working in the wedding chapel, I realized that the emotional drama that comes along with weddings were not my cup of tea".

This is the reason why DeShawn decided to shift her attention to the hotel sector, beginning with an internship in the catering services department at Westin Bonaventure in downtown Los Angeles. This was not an easy challenge, especially as DeShawn did not have a car at the time and had to take the bus from Malibu: "I gladly got up before sunrise to go and stand on Pacific Coast Highway and wait for the bus. The idea of working for a large hotel was pretty exciting. And the gentleman who I did the internship with, was great. I remember him taking me on trips into Chinatown to purchase décor for the ballrooms. I learned a lot during that semester. But I think the most important lesson I learned was that the aspects of the events that I loved the most came after the contract was signed. And had very little to do with the jobs of the catering and banquet staff. I loved the planning of events, not so much the selling of the property and the space".

DeSHAWN WYNN

DeShawn has more than 20 years of experience in the meeting and event industry. She has executed events for education, non-profit, corporate, religious and government agencies. In 2010, DeShawn established Wynning Touch Event Design—a company that specializes in strategic planning and content design. In her everyday work she places particular emphasis on creation, wishing each event branded by her to be exceptional, strategically thought-out, engaging and responding to individual needs of participants. DeShawn has volunteered for many industry organizations (MPI Southern California Chapter, National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners). She graduated from Pepperdine University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and earned the Certified Meeting Professional subspecialty in Healthcare awarded by Events Industry Council. She is a renowned expert, hosting sessions at numerous industry meetings and teaching classes at the California State University, Dominguez Hills.

For some time DeShawn's attention turned from career to getting a job to pay the bills so that she did not have to move back to her parents. Luck was once again on her side as her professor's wife was the Executive Director for a small non-profit organization called California Campus Compact, with UCLA as its fiscal partner: "I was only there for a year before the organization moved to San Francisco. However, it was there that I learned about grant writing, and how to put together small educational events. What I now realize is that this was the beginning of a series of jobs that would introduce me to careers in the MICE industry. I still did not have a career focus. My only concern was to pay the bills. I was so focused on the short term, that I did not realize that the foundation for my career was being laid. It did not register that I was gaining valuable industry skills that would help me build my current business".

Starting a business

Indeed, while none of the jobs she held (initially in various non-profits including the American Heart Association) had the title "event planner" or "meeting planner", the scope of work definitely required her to plan some type of event and encompassed the need to gather people: "Whether it was a fundraiser, community festival, educational seminar, or client training. A lightbulb went off, and I began to evaluate the work that I had been doing since college. I now fully understood that I could make a career as an event planner outside of planning weddings or working for a hotel. I asked my college roommate to help me with my resume. As my career objective she wrote, 'I would like to utilize my 16 years of meeting & planning experience'. This is how it all began".

As is often the case, the beginnings were not easy. The moment DeShawn clearly defined her business goal and placed emphasis on the meetings industry unfortunately coincided with an economic downturn affecting both the United States and worldwide. For economic reasons most U.S. companies and agencies were eliminating their planning staff, not hiring. Or perhaps this is how things were meant to be? After almost a year of trying to find work, DeShawn decided to take a leap of faith and set up her own business, forming Wynning Touch Event Design, which she successfully runs up to this day: "But if I am really honest, and reflect on my path to this point, I was always destined to be an entrepreneur. It is who I am. The little girl selling kumquats to her classmates knew that was training ground for future endeavors".

Experiences and design

The design process is what DeShawn loves most about her job. The concept covers much more than the otherwise significant aesthetic or stage design, which usually come to mind when people think of it: "I love the ability to get creative with the content and program design. The ability to sit with my client and brainstorm about who is going to be in the room, and how to design an event that will meet the needs of everyone, is what fuels my hustle. That is the challenge I love!!!".

This explains why during the pandemic DeShawn was not particularly enthusiastic about developing virtual events that would only involve the online mode. Devoid of the type of experiences that participants can truly appreciate only in person, using all of their senses, digital events are also affected by many

other potential obstacles. What is worse, the variables remain out of planner's control. Network errors, slow Internet connection, platform and software failures and, last but not least, power outages are only some examples on a much longer list: "Does this mean that everything is going to go right in the case of an onsite event? Of course not. Especially in the pandemic era, when planning has been like using a Magic 8-ball and there are contingency plans on top of contingency plans. The focus of a well-designed event seeks to have every participant leave feeling as if it was planned with them specifically in mind. People are way more forgiving of the event hiccups, when they see that there was effort put in to meet the needs of all stakeholders".

New challenges

DeShawn draws attention to another significant phenomenon. While the pandemic sped up the development of new technologies and made us learn a lot about how technology can help to keep us connected, and can keep businesses going, it has also taught us just how important face-to-face meetings are. People appreciate them much more now that that they have experienced numerous lockdowns and spent a lot of time at home: "Yes, it is wonderful to be able to connect with hundreds of people from your living room. But being able to look someone directly in their eyes, and touch their hand, is what people seemed to have truly missed". This is also evident in most recent trends. To an even greater degree than in the pre-pandemic days, meeting planners are spotlighting the networking features. Obviously, an attractive agenda and educational value continue to count, but so does the time spent on establishing relationships and less formal talks. In addition to generating business benefits, these activities also boost the engagement of participants.

Still, the list of challenges that meeting planners are facing today does not end here. The most obvious ones are related to uncertain future and prices going up (transportation, lodging, food & beverages, energy, etc.). Unfortunately, buyers' budgets have not joined the trend and in some cases have actually been reduced. To keep their operations effective, planners should also take note of the changes affecting information perception and processing, especially among the representatives of younger generations. This is where technologies – social media, to be specific - once again come into play, as they are crucial in making news bites, often involving multimedia content, popular: "The amount of time that you have to deliver your message is becoming shorter and shorter. In less than 30 seconds, you need to catch my attention, explain your product, and convince me to like you. And yes, I said... like you. The rise of the social media influencer is also forcing companies to no longer hide behind a logo. People want to connect with the human behind the company. Marketing has become a lot more intimate". Fortunately, events match these trends, which seems to be a sign of good things to come.

DeShawn is also far from calling it a day. She admits she feels satisfied, but there is still much more work for her to do. In addition to running the company, she wishes to make a larger difference within the industry, by serving on committees and boards of industry organisations: "I want to be a resource to other Black women owning companies, and soloprenuers. I have also discovered how much I love to teach, share knowledge and experience with others. So now I am starting to devote more attention to developing my gift as a public speaker at all types of meetings, not limited to MICE industry".

■ Irena Krzyżewska, Michał Kalarus

Europe dominates the **GDS-Index**

The Swedish city of Gothenburg was again named the world's most sustainable city in the Global Destination Sustainability (GDS) Index. Dominated by European cities, the top 30 nevertheless featured several representatives of other parts of the world. Cracow became the first Polish city to make the list.

A performance improvement programme dedicated to destinations hosting MICE events, the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS-Index) benchmarks their progress in implementing the sustainable development policy. The assessed areas include both activities strictly related to ecology and environmental protection, but also those supporting local communities (such as generating new jobs and using the services of local suppliers).

KEY CRITERIA

The list of criteria comprises 69 indicators evaluating destinations across four main areas addressing the commitment of particular cities and regions pertaining to environmental performance (e.g. reduction of carbon emissions, investing in renewable energies, waste and water management, air pollution levels, eco-friendly public transport, focus on green areas), social progress (e.g. health and wellness, corruption, education, gender equality, tolerance, general wellbeing of residents and their development opportunities, personal safety, inclusivity, access to information), as well as destination management performance (sustainability and regeneration strategy, awareness, investing in tourism, transport accessibility, research, reports and certificates, etc.). The support given to the meetings industry (policy towards entrepreneurs, investing in MICE offer and infrastructure) is also ranked, along

THE GDS-INDEX 2022 – TOP 30:

Gothenburg, Sweden (92.98%)
Bergen, Norway (88.36%)
Copenhagen, Denmark (86.7%)
Aalborg, Denmark (86.41%)
Glasgow, United Kingdom (84.09%)
Stockholm, Sweden (84.08%)
Belfast, United Kingdom (84.01%)
Aarhus, Denmark (83.45%)
Oslo, Norway (83.18%)
Lyon, France (83%)
Helsinki, Finland (82.8%)
Kerry, Ireland (82.43%)
Tyrol, Austria (80.93%)
Middelfart, Denmark (80.51%)
Reykjavik, Iceland (80.3%)
Zurich, Switzerland (80.16%)
Goyang, South Korea (78.34%)
Odense, Denmark (76.6%)
Melbourne, Australia (76.55%)
Brussels, Belgium (75.91%)
Cork, Ireland (75.03%)
Svendborg, Denmark (74.94%)
Montreal, Canada (74.46%)
Paris, France (74.34%)
Berlin, Germany (74.13%)
Sydney, Australia (73.76%)
Bangkok, Thailand (73.66%)
Faroe Islands (73.31%)
Galway, Ireland (73.16%)

Much more than cinema

The modern seat of the **European Film Center CAMERIMAGE** will be built in Toruń by the end of 2025! Home of the most important film event in Poland – the **EnergaCAMERIMAGE** International Film Festival. The final shape of the facility, which will serve not only to the art of film, should be known in January 2023. The Center designed by the renowned Austrian architectural office Baumschlager Eberle Lustenau will be completed, according to the schedule, by the end of 2025.

European Film Center CAMERIMAGE will be one of Poland's most modern congress facilities. The investment cost is 130 million $, of which 85 million $ is a grant from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, and 45 million $ is a contribution from the City of Toruń. **European Film Center CAMERIMAGE** will operate throughout the year in many fields of culture and business. In the seat of the institution, next to a significant cultural and congress hall for over 1,500 people, there will also be a Market Space, a Cinema House (3 screening rooms, including one IMAX large-format cinema room), an Art Gallery devoted to audiovisual arts, an Education Center and a Film Studio.

See you at ECFC in 2025!

/ecfcamerimage

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EUROPEAN FILM CENTER
CAMERIMAGE

inwestycja.ecfcamerimage.pl

with the commitment and performance of the local sector's supply chain (agencies, PCOs, DMCs, subcontractors, hotels, conference and congress venues, restaurants, airports, etc.).

DOMINATING TRENDS

Authors of this year's ranking not only showcased the leading destinations, but also attempted to identify several dominating trends in the area of sustainable development. First, they drew attention to the growing significance of related initiatives, demonstrated by the fact that already 80% of cities and regions selected by business travellers have implemented or are implementing sustainable strategies (compared to only 47% in 2019). What is more, 45% of participating destinations (up by 10% from 2021) are collaborating with the public and stakeholders in all related aspects. In addition, as many as 48% of DMOs applied a system to measure and monitor the impact of their events (up from 15% in 2019). Equity, diversity and inclusivity are also an increasingly important topic for organisations, although results show that 29% of destinations do not have any DEI strategy in place. Finally, all types of certifications are becoming more desirable, with a distinct increase in certified venue averages (from 47% in 2021 to 58% in 2022).

WHO IS ON TOP?

Again named the world's most sustainable city, Gothenburg (Sweden) successfully implemented close to 93% of all guidelines and was followed by Bergen, Copenhagen, Aalborg, and Bordeaux (see for the full list). Interestingly, the top p. 30 was clearly dominated by European destinations and included only five representatives of other regions - Goyang (South Korea), Montreal (Canada), Sydney and Melbourne (Australia), as well as Bangkok (Thailand). This phenomenon partially shows the maturity of the European market, but to a large degree results from the fact that the GDS-Index was originally developed in Europe where it continues to be most popular and recognised. Last but not least, this is the very first time that a Polish city made the discussed list. Cracow, capital of the Małopolska region, implemented 43% of criteria set up by the ranking's authors.

The GDS-Index is a joint initiative of City Destinations Alliance (CityDNA, formerly known as European Cities Marketing), International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA, mostly its Scandinavian chapter), IMEX Group, and MCI. IK

IRF: Incentive travel on the rise

***The IRF 2023 Trends Report* by Incentive Research Foundation is the latest crucial publication to offer another opportunity to confirm well-known but continuously relevant trends of the incentive market.**

The still practiced (at least partially) remote work, labour shortages, and a challenging market situation make all types of incentives one of the most critical tools helping numerous organizations implement adopted development strategies. Making it possible to not only retain top employees, but also to acquire new specialists, they are effective in team building by inspiring employee loyalty and building corporate culture across particular teams. For this reason, the future of the incentive market does seem relatively stable. Incentives are no longer applied to simply drive sales and reward top performers, but also, if not primarily, to achieve goals matching the needs reported by HR teams. This is one of the reasons why according to the latest forecasts made by buyers, the number of people participating in incentive travel programmes in 2023 will increase by 48% compared to 2019. As reported in Incentive Travel Index, in 2024 this figure is expected to be even more impressive and reach 61%.

In *Incentive Expectations and Reality in the Hospitality Industry*, the IRF reported that 54% of company and corporate meeting planners cite the incentive agencies' ability to maintain and deliver expected service levels as one of their primary concerns when arranging incentive trips. Unfortunately, problematic situations are not that uncommon, especially if we take into consideration staff shortages (affecting not only agencies and DMC offices, but also numerous hotels and event venues), decreased budgets and simultaneously growing costs of virtually all services required to develop an incentive trip (with air travel, accommodation, and catering particularly visible). In other words, it should not come as a surprise to learn that incentive planners identify rising costs and inflation as one of their top concerns (these trends were pointed out by as many as 85% of North American respondents and 73% from the rest of the world).

In addition, the post-pandemic landscape is distinguished by evolving preferences of both incentive travel buyers and participants referring to the general character of this category. First and foremost, the experiences in question need to be more experiential, authentic and customized, and thus more memorable than ever. IK

THE RISE OF POLAND'S MEETINGS INDUSTRY

If you think about the world of events and how it has changed over the past few years, some things will come to mind at once, while others can be a lot more elusive. In a world saturated with industry buzzwords, like *innovation, resilience, hybrid* and *online*, success will increasingly depend on more subtle factors than the sum total of '(the right) event venue + (the right) hotels + (the right) restaurants + (the right) city'. So what does it take to be a great, internationally competitive event-host destination in 2023?

This article will take a closer look at some of the key ingredients to a truly successful event destination formula, at both country and city level. Let's start!

WHAT MAKES POLAND TRULY SPECIAL IS…

In short, the overall experience of organizing an event in just about any major Polish city, whether it's Warsaw, Krakow, Wroclaw, Lodz, Poznan, Gdansk or Katowice! All of these cities have great, unique venues at their disposal, both emblematic of their region's history/culture and state-of-the-art congress centres, capable of delivering both one-time, (audio)visually mesmerizing productions, and top-tier, annual international formats.

As if this didn't make things easy enough, literally everyone seems to be speaking conversational-to-fluent English in Poland, which comes with incredible hospitality and approachability attached. A long list of companies and subcontractors you'll comfortably be choosing from will often make it a point to go the extra mile and make sure you're happy with the end result. Having successfully organized a variety of large, international events like World Youth Days, 41st UNESCO World Heritage Committee Session, COP 24, World Urban Forum or multiple international sports events, it very much feels like no challenge is too big for Central Europe's meetings industry leader.

IT STARTS WITH INFRASTRUCTURE, BUT NEVER ENDS THERE!

But let's face it… In today's competitive event world, having beautiful and diverse event infrastructure is a necessary step to become a serious player on the global stage of iconic event destinations, but it's never enough, is it? If you want to reach for some of the most strategically impressive event formats out there, having a large, modern, nice-looking venue might no longer cut it. It means that as an event manager you should be well aware by now of the

practical/creative/functional advantages that the online world is bringing to your doorstep every single day and, more importantly, how it has already impacted audience expectations towards offline/hybrid events. After all, even in the loneliest of moments of our pandemic isolation, we had all the access to great online publications, field-specific webinars, lectures and workshops. Such ease of access to top quality content across sciences, industries and disciplines, coming from all over the world, is bound to raise your audience's content quality/discipline expectations. But remember that your audience likely won't forgive you also (too) short coffee breaks and lack of networking opportunities.

One of the main reasons why so many of us got fed up with online events rather quickly is that, for far too long, a lot of event organizers out there thought they could get away with migrating their tried-and-tested onsite formats online 1:1, with a cosmetic change here and there. Nothing further from the truth, as it turned out all too soon. As an industry catalyst, 2020 may have reshuffled international event-organizer markets more than anything else before it, with those quick to update their skillsets and technical infrastructure to the new requirements suddenly heading the pack and having more assignments than ever before, overnight, and those waiting for the 'traditional' modus operandi to return, wasting far too much precious time in the process and staying far behind as a consequence. Compare it to the notoriously iconic textbook case of Nokia and the birth of smartphones, if you like. So what does it tell us here in Poland?

TIME FOR SKILLS 2.0

Poland was, overall, quick to respond to the 2020 industry challenges through both structural solutions and impressive innovations. For the industry as a whole, 2020-2022 was the time that Sir David Attenborough would likely describe as 'mass migration', i.e. re-focusing, smart adaptation and re-designing many a business model to suit the need of the hour, preferably overnight. Above all, however, it was a period when everyone realized the importance of taking their industry skills to the next level, if only to better understand all of the budgeting novelties, new categories of risks, prediction and planning uncertainties. It was all about survival or extinction. No excuses.

No wonder that conference and congress centres around the world started partnering with trusted, experienced online-event organizers to be able to effectively dispel their clients' doubts and address their newly emerging and dynamically evolving needs. This also included rigor and discipline in implementing smart, advanced H&S procedures, safety precautions and standardizing industry best-practice, among others, in order to mitigate client skepticism around the limitations of the 'new normal'.

Especially that after dozens and dozens of online conferences, audiences became ever more sentimentally impatient to get back to conference centres and experience the power of togetherness, feeling part of the same 'ideological tribe' or community of the like-minded. After all, nothing beats the buzz, the positive energy, the hundreds of smiling faces lost in conversation during networking sessions, right?

SO WHAT'S NEXT?

If I were to make one prediction about the most successful meetings destinations in the world in 2023 and beyond, I would say this: the meetings industry's future belongs to those who set the trends (also, if not primarily, on a purely creative level), not those who imitate and follow them, however short the delay may be! To truly stand out in a competitive, international market, you really need to take your destination's international storytelling and creativity (reputation) to the next level. In doing so, you should learn to become one of the industry's few disruptive innovators, going over and above the customary ways of reaching new audiences (incl. prospective clients) and out-of-the-box business partners, and do so with the sheer freshness and the power of the stories you choose to discover, create and share with the world.

Importantly, great storytelling needs to be/feel authentic, effortless and spontaneous. If you can't produce any of the three (let alone all of them), your second best option might just be finding the best out there and learning from them, adapting their initiatives and creative approaches to your context. Last but not least, great storytelling rarely works in isolation, so if you really want to succeed, you must make sure that the entire city (region and/or country) supports you in your storytelling efforts. It's one thing to have a group of high-profile ambassadors promoting your city internationally as a global meetings destination, or a great congress centre website with professional (yet uninspiring) social-media profiles attached; it's quite another to have a significant thought-leadership presence in your industry, both in the eyes of industry experts and the general public at large. No better way to go about it than with great content and strong quality supervision. At the end of the day, it all boils down to continuously asking yourself questions like: *Is what I'm proposing really fresh and innovative? If yes, how? What's in it for my audience? What are my destination's truly unique characteristics and which of them have the strongest storytelling potential? How do I set my goals, measure progress and – equally importantly – what do I do, if I'm not meeting my goals in time?* Once you start asking yourself these questions regularly and often enough, or get the right people to help you (re)discover your best answers, you'll be on the right path.

And one last thing: if you have specific questions about Poland's meeting industry, remember that nothing beats a person-to-person conversation, so feel free to contact Poland Convention Bureau directly and follow it on LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram (@PolandCVB #PolandCVB). See you at a conference in Poland!

Łukasz Cioch, LCMedia.pl

POLAND CONVENTION BUREAU

POLISH TOURISM ORGANISATION

LET'S TALK BUSINESS

It starts with **Czesc**
How are you?
How can we help? What do you do?
Let's elevate
Take it higher
What do you need
Venue or supplier
We've got it all you'll see
For...

Refrain

We are the destination
Meeting expectations
Year after year
So here's our invitation
For cooperation
The time is here
Let's make a plan
Meet us at our stand
Let's talk business (X4)

Dzien dobry
Is how we greet you
Dziekuje
The word for Thank You
Poland where your dreams come true

Refrain

Come to Poland, the perfect place
To host your event with style and grace

Incentives, conventions
Professional intentions
Trust and security
Not only a necessity
Friendly courageous
Nothing is beneath us
Passion and pride, dedication
Turns every event into a revelation
For...

Refrain

Lyrics and music by Brian Allan
- Musical Ambassador of Poland CVB

POLAND
CONVENTION
BUREAU

POLISH
TOURISM
ORGANISATION

POLAND

"Come to Poland, the perfect place,
To host your event with style and grace..."